

DONALD M. PAYNE
10TH DISTRICT, NEW JERSEY

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
AND THE WORKFORCE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD,
YOUTH AND FAMILIES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMPLOYER-EMPLOYEE
RELATIONS

COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA

RANKING MEMBER



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3010

August 28, 2002

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The Honorable Melvin Martinez
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban
Development
451 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20410

Dear Secretary Martinez:

I am writing on behalf of the Greater Newark HUD Tenants Coalition to respectfully urge you to renew HUD's contract with the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) for \$1.2 million for FY 2003 to implement its highly successful national Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) program. It is my understanding that CNCS's Chief Operating Officer has pledged his support for a three-year extension of the program, and HUD Assistant Secretary Weicher has expressed his support on several occasions.

The VISTA program has served as a leading model and prototype for the President's call for national service. Although the program has funded an average of 50 VISTA Volunteers annually since 1995, the program has been stalled since November 2001 due to a freeze on all technical assistance funding, including funds owed to CNCS under the 1998 contract. As a result, CNCS has had to absorb VISTA Volunteer payroll costs since November 2001 from other sources. In addition, the national VISTA program in HUD's multifamily housing has been closed, with volunteers in the field unable to renew their contracts and agencies unable to hire new recruits. In New Jersey, the Greater Newark HUD Tenant Coalition has been unable to fill its three vacant positions, and will lose its two current volunteers at the end of August 2002, leaving no organizers to provide education and training to tenants.

As you are aware, Section 514 of the 1997 Multifamily Assisted Housing Reform and Affordability Act mandates that HUD provide up to \$10 million annually for technical assistance to promote tenant and community participation in Section 8 contract renewal decisions. The Volunteers in Service to America program is an integral part of achieving these aims. On March 9, 2002, Assistant Secretary Weicher reported at a House Appropriations Subcommittee hearing that prior funds (\$600,000) owed to CNCS had been processed, a measure which would have effectively reactivated the VISTA program at that time. However, those funds have not yet been received by CNCS.

I believe VISTA volunteers are essential to ensuring that the residents of New Jersey receive the necessary training and education to maintain and improve their homes. I respectfully urge you to restore this much-needed program by expediting a new contract, funded at \$1.2 million effective October 1, 2002. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,


Donald M. Payne
Member of Congress